

Clearest Warning

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by [barcharonte](#)

Summary

When Will was unexpectedly released from the BSHCI, he made the decision to quit his job, sell his house, leave his dogs behind, and hit the road. He never told anyone about Hannibal being the Ripper, so he was reasonably sure Hannibal would not follow.

He was wrong.

Notes

What started as an effort to write an angsty one-shot turned into a non-stop three-day project to achieve the fluffiest fluff that ever fluffed.

I was inspired by Tomo's Coffee Cups and Cigarettes, which is where the title is from.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

"I believe I will be much more popular in the psychiatric circles," Will told Chilton, "now that everyone thinks I am the Chesapeake Ripper. They ought to come knocking anytime now." At Chilton's narrowed lids and the slight, irritated twist of his lips, Will knew he had him. "I am not looking forward to talking to them."

"I can fend them off," Chilton said, a greedy gleam in his eyes. "But what would I get in return, Mr. Graham?"

"I suppose I can agree to therapy with you, give you unlimited access into my mind." Will said sullenly, but inside, he was glad that the man was so easy to steer. "But only if you do not allow *any* of them here."

"Consider it done," Chilton jumped at the opportunity. And that was how Will ensured he would not see Hannibal Lecter in BSHCI anytime soon. Although charismatic and influential, Hannibal did not have the authority to walk past Chilton, and Chilton would not allow him passage if he thought someone else would get the privilege into the mind of his most prized patient. It was an underhanded move on Will's part, but necessary.

Will did not want to see Hannibal for a myriad of reasons. At first, it was because the thought of seeing that smug face, hearing the unspoken taunts for having fallen into his trap so thoroughly, was unbearable. Then it was because of the emotions such a visit would evoke in Will; he would berate himself even more relentlessly for having failed to see Hannibal for who he was, for failing to capture him, and mostly, for feeling betrayed by Hannibal's actions.

Disappointment requires expectation, he had told the man not too long ago. He had let himself expect things from Hannibal, against his distrusting and solitary nature. He had let himself fall, and now found himself at the bottom. As easy as it was to blame it all on Hannibal, Will also knew he had only himself to blame.

He had been so trusting, so eager to have someone who would respect and appreciate him for who he was and not who he should be, someone who would accept him with all his quirks and darkness and instability, that he was blinded to the similarities between his own profile of the Chesapeake Ripper and Hannibal Lecter.

Granted, half his brain had been on fire, but that was neither here nor there. Looking back at his past self through Hannibal's eyes, he saw a pathetic man, starving for attention and care, practically begging to be used and abused. He was never going to be able to forgive himself for that.

Another thing he wouldn't forgive himself for was his silence. He told no one, not even to himself in the silence and solitude of his barren cell, who Hannibal was. It was an act of self-preservation, and he was entitled to whatever he could to protect himself from a cannibalistic serial killer's ire. One could also interpret it, if one so wished, as a refusal to play Hannibal's game. There was no doubt Hannibal was prepared for Will to sing, and Will felt a perverse sense of pleasure at the thought of denying him the satisfaction.

His cell had no windows, and he had no way to tell the time of day. But he felt that it was in the darkest hours that he could confess to himself that the real reason was something else.

Something he couldn't stop. Something else for which he couldn't forgive himself. Something else he would take to his grave.

He loved Hannibal Lecter.

He had not realized this when he raised a gun at Hannibal's head. He had no name for what caused that sense of unease at the thought of telling Jack, Alana, Chilton, or hell, even Beverly, that Hannibal was the Ripper. It was during a particularly annoying therapy session with Chilton that it dawned on him. His rage, his sense of betrayal, his heartbreak and denied expectations... None of which triumphed the visceral ache in his gut at the thought of Hannibal behind bars.

Hannibal was wild and dark, dangerous with his bloody teeth and enticing in his mastery of his art. He was not meant to be captured. It would be such a shame for that brilliant mind to be laid to waste, restricted to the mediocre-at-best attempts of the likes of Chilton to understand him. *Will* understood him. Will *saw* him, saw the beautiful beast Hannibal covered in layers of bespoke suits and impeccable taste.

And Will would protect him. He would love him and hold his memory dear. He would make sure that Hannibal was not subjected to psychological tests as he was, that Hannibal did not eat the goo that passed for food around here as he did. Hannibal would slumber in his Egyptian cotton sheets, dazzle socialites in operas and art galleries, cook delicious meals out of human flesh and glut himself on them. Will would make sure of it.

It wasn't rational, nor was it sane in any sense of the word. Perhaps Will should be in an asylum, after all. But it was what it was, and there was nothing to do now but to accept it, and hope it passed at some point.

So he smiled each time Chilton bragged about diverting Hannibal's many attempts to visit him, thanked him for his dedication, and waded into the quiet of the stream.

*

Will had been surprised when the door to his cell was opened, and he was told by a fuming Chilton that he could leave. Whether the man was angry that Will wasn't the Chesapeake Ripper after all, or because he could no longer arrange therapy sessions to his liking, Will did not know. He was handed the clothes he had when he was brought there, and had to sign a couple of papers.

After that, he was free. He had not expected this, and was suitably confused. When he saw Jack lingering by the front doors, hoping to pull him right back into the investigation without so much as a proper apology, Will knew he had two options.

The first one was to allow Jack to do just that. Will would have his jobs back then, both the teaching post and the Special Agent title. He would go back to Wolf Trap to his pack. He would be back in the game, unwittingly playing whatever new role Hannibal wrote for him.

The second was not letting any of those happen. And so, with only the vague outlines for what this choice entailed, Will pulled the guilt card on Jack. He didn't believe in Will's innocence, and now Will wouldn't come back.

Will had just hoped it kept Jack away long enough for him to figure out what to do. Though he needn't have worried, for it only took him his first night back in his empty house to decide.

Giving up on sleep before dawn, he drafted three e-mails; one for the real estate agency, one for Alana, one for HR at Quantico. He was on his porch making use of the warm morning, a cup of coffee by his left hand as the right hovered above the send button, when he heard a car approach.

He had hoped that Hannibal would do the gentlemanly thing and give him his space for some time before making a move, but it appeared that being denied access to Will for so long made him anxious to start his game anew.

Will wasn't going to play, though.

He took a leisurely sip from his coffee and leaned back in his chair as he watched first the Bentley, then Hannibal come into view. The man was all poise as he exited his car and, with perfect posture, walked towards him.

"Hello, Will," he said as he climbed up the steps and came to stand by Will's desk. From where he was, he could not see the laptop's screen, and Will was glad for this small but albeit insignificant upper hand.

"Hello, Dr. Lecter," he said without looking up, hitting send for all three mails before finally paying attention to his guest.

"You look well," Hannibal said, eyes roaming over Will's features with little indication of what he was actually thinking. Will, in possession of perfectly good eyes and mirrors, knew that was bullshit. His hair was long enough to curl over his shoulders, and the lack of sun combined with hospital food had done nothing to flatter him. He looked gaunt and weary, and that was only the physical part.

"Flattery will get you nowhere, doctor, seeing as it is false," Will warned with a grin, and closed his laptop. "Take a seat, why don't you."

"I was merely expressing my observation," Hannibal said, unruffled. He sat across Will, the table a barrier between them. "The last time I saw you, you were holding a gun to my head. I admit, my assessment of your appearance could have been more accurate if I had been able to see you in the hospital, but unfortunately, Dr. Chilton was quite protective of you."

"Was he?" Will knew Chilton's vanity would have kept him from mentioning Will's express wishes to be left alone. He probably spun the tale to reflect himself as Will's sole choice in therapy. He could see the annoyance Hannibal was trying to hide. Too bad he was infinitely more clear to Will now. "How very rude of him." He added, knowing that he would not feel an ounce of guilt if Chilton ended up on Hannibal's dinner table.

“Indeed,” Hannibal said, noncommittal. “But enough about him. You went through great physical and mental hardships, Will. How are you?”

All of which were your doing, Will thought, as he admired the morning sun on Hannibal’s face, softening the sharp edges just enough that his façade of friendly concern looked convincing. He looked beautiful. “I have been better,” he said as he took another sip of coffee. “I would offer you a drink, but I don’t believe you would like off-brand instant coffee, and I don’t have tea.”

“Thank you. I find myself in no need for further nourishment at the moment.” *Smooth bastard*. “As a psychiatrist, I feel it is my obligation to tell you that you would benefit from therapy, after the past two months.”

“Is this a professional visit, then?” Will asked, unable but more importantly unwilling to stop himself from teasing.

“If that is what you prefer,” Hannibal bent his head to the side as if he was trying to extract something from Will’s slight smile and relaxed posture. “Although it would be a lie to say I was here merely for a visitation.”

“And we have no lies between us, do we, Dr. Lecter?” Will’s smile turned bitter. “Just heavily obscure metaphors and lies of omission.”

Hannibal’s eyes narrowed to such a small degree that for anyone else, it would have been undetectable. “We never got the chance to discuss our final moments together. Do you still harbour the belief that I am the Ripper, Will?”

“*Harbour*,” Will repeated. The fields surrounding his house were coming to life slowly, frost thawing and revealing brighter colours dotted in dew. “*Belief*,” he huffed. “Why am I here, Hannibal?” he asked, the name slipping from him as his control wavered. To regain it, he focused on a raccoon in the distance, running from one bush to another, taking cover. His dogs, were they here, would have enjoyed chasing it.

“I must ask what you mean.”

Will felt all ease drain from him as his muscles tensed. His jaw clenched, and his fingers around the mug turned white. “What’s your plan for me now?” Will said, his voice flat. “I understood the previous role, the scapegoat. It made sense. I would pay for your crimes while you carried on undetected. Why bother proving me innocent? You undid everything you worked to achieve. *That* doesn’t make sense.” A sudden bout of inspiration struck him. “Did you get bored?” Will’s eyes snapped to Hannibal’s face, and found only a blank mask. “Is that it? Was it so boring without me there to fuck with?”

“I see you still hold the same convictions,” Hannibal said calmly, and Will wondered if he would die on his front porch, wearing only his undershirt and boxers under the blanket he wrapped around himself. “It is curious, then, why I never received a visit from Jack, or anyone else for that matter.”

“This should be interesting. Tell me why you think that is, doctor.” His tone was mocking. He was toeing the line between justifiable righteousness and Hannibal’s standards for rudeness. What organs would he pick, Will wondered, and what recipes would he choose for him? Would he invite Jack over to share, or would he enjoy a quiet dinner by himself?

“I can see three possible reasons,” Hannibal started. “They could be biding their time, carrying out background searches and arranging surveillance of my daily actions. After all, there is no evidence pointing towards me, and if I were the culprit, it would be unwise to approach me without some.” Will nodded once. “They might also not have believed you, of course. The aforementioned lack of evidence, and the serious illness you were only treated for after your capture, would be enough to make them doubt you.” Will nodded again.

“And the third?” Will prompted after Hannibal’s lengthy pause.

“The third, dear Will,” Hannibal blinked slowly, looking oddly satisfied like a sunbathing lion. “Is that you did not tell them.”

“Hmm,” Will hoped to hide his swallow by raising the mug to his lips. “Then the question is, which of them is correct? Not that it would mean much to you, seeing as you probably have contingency plans for your contingency plans for each case.”

Hannibal’s lips curled slightly, but what might have passed as a smile on someone else looked disapproving on him. “The answer would mean a lot to me, Will, and by proxy, to you.”

Will licked his lips. “Are you threatening me, Dr. Lecter?”

“On the contrary,” Hannibal replied without missing a beat. “I find myself feeling hopeful at the moment.”

Will frowned in consideration. What could hope have anything to do with this stalemate they were in? Ah, but Will was being carried away once again. Hannibal was drawing him into his mind games, twisting his thought process to fit his agenda. Will was not about to let himself be lured in by veiled implications and his own naive fantasies of companionship anymore.

“I suppose only time will tell, because I won’t,” he replied. “You are a patient man, Dr. Lecter. You’ve taught yourself to enjoy the wait. You’ll manage.”

“Waiting is only enjoyable if one knows what it is, exactly, that one might get at the end of the wait. What did you hope to get, Will, as you waited under Chilton’s thumb?”

Will shook his head slightly. “I thought I would die in that cell, either of old age or boredom.”

“That’s not what I asked,” Hannibal said, chiding.

“That’s all you’re getting, though.” Will drank the last of the coffee in one gulp.

“There’s no need to be rude, Will.”

“Or what?” Will shot up to his feet, and threw the empty cup to the porch floor with fervour. It shattered, some shards flying towards the field while some ended up near Hannibal’s feet. Hannibal was looking down at those now, an inscrutable expression on his face. “You would kill me? You would eat me? Are you mentally going through recipes right now, Hannibal? Tell me, what condiment goes best with brain sauté? Red wine, or white? Look at me!”

Hannibal, for once, tore his eyes from the shards by his feet and did as he asked. Will felt his breath catch on his throat when the eyes he expected would be empty were instead bright and- sad.

“I would eat your heart,” Hannibal murmured. It was as close to a confession as Will knew he would get, and not expecting anything of the sort, Will was surprised.

“Are you confessing?” He asked.

“I suppose there’s no reason not to,” Hannibal replied, standing up with the air of someone who just made a decision and taking a step towards Will. “Seeing as, even after you figured it out, you did not tell anyone.” Will huffed as he took a step back. Hannibal kept approaching, though. “Why, Will? Tell me why.”

“They wouldn’t have believed me,” Will shot back.

“You couldn’t have known without at least trying.” Will felt the wooden banisters of his porch dig into his back as Hannibal finally cornered him. “Tell me.”

“No.”

“You won’t say it, or perhaps you can’t? Are you ashamed, Will?” Hannibal lifted up a hand to Will’s face, not minding how tense he was or how he flinched as fingers started to caress his cheek. Hannibal’s eyes took on a sheen, managing to look both dangerous and dreamy at the same time. “Do you regret giving your heart to me, to do with as I wish?”

Will froze. Hannibal’s hand rose to his hair.

“*All human wisdom is contained in these two words: Wait, and hope.*” Hannibal murmured, his face thawing like the frost from grass. He looked at Will with reverence now, as if he was beholding something precious. Will could not remember ever seeing him look so real. “I waited, Will, and I hoped. But with all my wisdom, I could never entirely predict you.”

“Let me go,” Will managed to get the words out, but his limbs would not listen to him and move.

“Do you really want that?” Hannibal asked, a smile forming and growing wider as Will watched, transfixed.

“I am moving.” Will said in a rush. Hannibal’s slow caress of his hair stopped at that, as did his smile. “I am selling the house. I quit my job. Alana will find homes for my dogs. I’m leaving.” He swallowed with some difficulty. “I may not want to see you incarcerated or dead, but that does not mean I’ll let you play me anymore.” His voice broke at the end.

“Will,” Hannibal breathed, the name on his lips like the words of a prayer.

“Don’t- don’t pretend,” Will said, as he remembered a similar plea: *Please don’t lie to me.*

“You let my brain boil, you killed- *Abigail.*” he shivered, more from the memories than from the blanket sliding off him and onto the banister. “You framed me for your murders. Don’t act like my *feelings* matter to you.”

“You weren’t ready.” Hannibal let his hand fall to his side, but remained otherwise immobile.

“You couldn’t have known without at least trying,” Will threw Hannibal’s words back at him. “And it would have been so easy, too. You just had to stop assuming you knew everything and *ask.*”

“I find it hard to believe you would have accepted me, Will,” Hannibal said, but he was beginning to frown.

“It wasn’t easy,” Will said, finally managing to lift a hand to push Hannibal away a bit. “Cannibalism, serial murder, continuous flirting with the FBI. You don’t pack a light baggage, but those, I could accept.” He paused. “Psychic driving, *killing our daughter*, letting me think I’m insane, putting me in prison. Yeah, those, not so much.” Will gave Hannibal’s chest another push, finally gaining enough space that let him breathe easier. Hannibal’s eyes were fixed on his, but Will avoided them. “You may have fooled me, but I am not a fool, Hannibal. What I am, is done.”

Stepping aside, Will walked forward resolutely. He heard Hannibal’s clothes rustle as he turned, but he did not stop. Stepping over the broken cup, he reached the door to the house and only then did he look back. Hannibal was half turned towards him, the sun at his back and his dark, fathomless eyes on Will.

“It is the perfect time to kill me, you know,” Will said. “I let everyone who cares to know I’ll be gone, and soon. Better decide on that recipe, fast.” And with that taunt, he went inside. His heart was beating fast inside his ribcage, and Will wondered, as the prey often do with disconnected whimsy, whether love left a detectable flavour in the meat.

He kept his back to the door, and listened. He did not hear Hannibal’s footsteps, but when he heard the car start and drive off, he was shocked nonetheless.

So Hannibal had been serious about not telling lies. The man owed his survival to cold, hard rationality, as well as a healthy dose of Machiavellianism. Just now, he had acted in accordance with who he really was, and not as who he projected himself to be. This was the most honest the man had ever been to Will, as he refused Will’s love as well as his flesh. Will had no use to him now, not even as food. No need to dirty his hands or muddy up his plans with a lovesick excuse of a man.

Less than 24 hours, and Will was released for the second time. He did not feel free at all. What he felt was broken, his pieces all over the place, and this time, it felt final.

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Will didn't say goodbye to his dogs. It felt wrong, somehow. He wasn't the same person they knew. Inside, he was twisted and bitter. The thought of staining their innocence kept him from seeking them out. That did not mean he did not cry as he packed his car with his meagre belongings, left the rest to the next tenants, and fled from the only home he'd known.

He wished Hannibal had never stopped by. If he hadn't, Will was pretty sure he could have found at least some level of solace with the wistful could-have-beens, half-formed would-have-beens, and self-righteous should-have-beens. He lost those too.

He knew his departure was hasty. But he left his phone on, did not drain his bank accounts, and would still reply to his e-mails. These should be enough to convince anyone he was not running from the law, if they suspect him. Would Hannibal utilize his absence and point at him as the Ripper again? Will avoided his red-rimmed eyes on the rear-view mirror and banished the thought. He would no longer concern himself with what Hannibal would or would not do.

That was his mindset as he drove two days and stayed at a neglected motel one night. On his second night, he was parking in front of his father's house.

Many things could be said about Beau Graham, especially concerning his emotional diligence, but most would be wrong. Beau took one look at his son, dropping by unannounced and dishevelled, shoulders low and eyes heavy, and told him he stank. Will dutifully went to take a shower, and emerged to a plate of modest food, the couch refurnished into a make-shift bed, and the remote control carefully placed on the coffee table beside a half-full bottle of Jack Daniels.

The subtle care in these actions, unannounced but appreciated all the more for it, were what made Will promptly go back to the bathroom and stay there until the urge to bawl passed. When he came out again, his father had retired to bed. That, too, was very thoughtful of him.

During breakfast, they talked.

"What dragged you here, boy?" Beau asked, voice hardened over years of smoking and drinking, but somehow still retaining the same timbre from Will's childhood.

"Got the jitters," Will replied. He did not know how his father didn't hear about his incarceration as a cannibalistic serial killer, but he wasn't about to question his good luck. He was also glad that Beau never listened to him and got himself a cell phone. It was as if Will never left home.

"Knew you'd get bored up there," came the retort, without a beat. "We're wanderers, Will, you and I. We work these," Beau wriggled his fingers, "not this," he tapped his temple. His eyes were glistening with amusement, and Will replied with an answering smile.

"I would like that, I think," he said. Losing himself in the innards of a boat motor sounded more therapeutical than weekly conversations with a man who took an obscene amount of pleasure mixing plaid, paisley and pinstripes in the same three-piece suit. With a sigh, Will focused on his father once more. "You know any gigs?"

"I might. A friend of mine runs a marine restoration company. Calls me up sometimes for last minute jobs. I'll ask him."

"Thank you, dad," Will said. Beau only nodded. And that was it. No, *how long are you staying?* No, *so now what?* The couch was his for as long as Will wanted, and if Will was there to stay, well, that was his problem now, wasn't it?

For the first time in almost a year, Will thought he could get better.

He followed in his father's footsteps and refrained from checking out the news. His tablet was gathering dust on one of the bookcases in the living room, charge already gone. No news channels were turned up on TV either, and neither Will nor Beau were quite fond of socializing enough to brave a trip to the town for a newspaper.

Will finalized the sale of his house through rigorous back and forth e-mailing with the realtor. A family with two children was now going to live there. Will gave the realtor Alana's number and told him to pass it on to the family in case they were interested in dogs. Alana had kept him up to date with the dogs, and only Ellie and Zoe had yet to find homes. They would get along well with children.

Jack was butthurt by Will's departure. He gave him a couple of calls, each designed specifically to guilt trip Will into going back and hunting down killers for him. Will heard all about how he was acting selfish like a child, and how many lives he could save if he got over himself. He then threatened Jack that he would stop taking his calls, and if he actually needed Will, he wouldn't be able to get through to him. That stopped the harassment pretty effectively, much to his surprise.

He received one mail from Beverly, and underneath the friendly scolding for not saying goodbye before he left, he detected guilt for ever thinking Will could be the Chesapeake Ripper. Will wished she wouldn't feel bad about it, though. He had known who the bastard was and kept that particular knowledge close to his heart, simultaneously preventing justice for the past victims and ensuring the continuation of future victims. That had to be worse. Possibly much, much worse. So he wrote back, apologized for not dropping by, wished her luck.

None of his correspondences ever mentioned Hannibal, on either side. Maybe that was a good thing, maybe it was not. Will had given up moralism for behaviourism for some time now.

His father's friend did end up calling Will for an odd job or two, but Will was more often found in a small dockyard workroom. The owner agreed to try him out for a week, and when Will proved himself competent, offered him work for two weeks a month. The pay was better than nothing, and being elbow deep in motors with oil stains all over his person worked like a charm for Will's mental wellbeing. He slept better, ate with more gusto, and talked more (which was still not much, but it was improvement nonetheless.)

One of his more talkative episodes found him in his father's backyard, the two of them sitting on folding chairs, sipping directly from their respective, already half-empty whiskey bottles.

Beau was trying to find a radio station to his liking, and during the process, came across a classical music station.

“Stop,” Will said before he could think better of it. Beau paused a moment, but shrugged and placed the radio on the grass. Will did not explain, and Beau did not ask. The evening around them was warm and humid, but a small breeze brought to them the scent of salt water and seaweed. It was ideal for comfortable silences.

“We never did talk much about my mother, did we?” Will asked instead. As if expecting the question, his father did a half side-nod, and drank up.

“Never knew what to tell you,” he admitted quietly. “Couldn’t make sense of it myself, to be honest. But I don’t think you are likely to cry for mama now, so. Ask, whatever.”

Will considered it for a minute. “Did you love each other?”

“I know I did,” Beau answered, and in that moment looked much older than his years. Even without his empathy, it would have been enough to make Will feel a pang of sadness. With it, though, it ached in his bones.

“We met at a bar,” Beau continued. “I was playing the guitar back then, backed up some bands or whatnot. She came on her summer break, surrounded with her friends. All girls the same age, but she... She was radiant.” Beau sighed. “Madeleine, her name was. She commented that a monkey could do better with the guitar than I. She wasn’t wrong either,” He chuckled. “She came from money, you see. Private tutors, musical training. She could fold me in half if she wanted. She didn’t though. I wanted to buy her a drink, she said yes. I think it was something of a game to her, son. I think she was slumming it. She liked the brawn and drawl, if you know what I mean. Your old man was not too bad back then.”

“You can still be a heartbreaker, dad,” Will went along with the attempt at humour to lighten the mood. “You just don’t want to.”

“Right you are,” Another sip. “Always was a one-shot kinda guy, I guess. Maddie was bright, and I adored her quick wit so much. She’d ditch her friends and we’d meet at the bar if I worked, or at the beach if I didn’t. I’d tell her stories about my brawls, and I’d always win the fight in the end whether it was true or not. I wanted to impress her. She’d laugh, and tell me about her life. We were so different on one level, but so similar too in how we enjoyed life. She had a mean streak and loathed the rich assholes her parents introduced her. On one memorable occasion, we imagined me beating one of them up as she watched.” Beau gave a dopey smile. “She liked that a lot.”

Will quickly connected that occasion as the foreplay to his conception, and dismissed the idea. “What happened then?”

“Her break ended. She went back to her fancy private university and loaded suitors, and I went back to my gigs. We promised to keep in touch, but never did. I was sure we wouldn’t see each other again. It was sad, but I accepted it. She wouldn’t give up her life to slum it with me for life, you know? I wouldn’t expect her to.” The good mood was fading now.

“Until one day she turned up at my doorstep, out of the blue. She had the smallest bundle in

her arms.” Beau looked to the horizon, uncaring of the fact that it was obscured by the yard fences, and miles besides. “She gave you to me, passed me your birth certificate like it was an ownership document, and told me she was getting married in a few months. I tried to ask her stuff, but she brushed them off. Gone like the wind, as they say. I called the number, but it was out of use. I gave up at some point, seeing as giving you up never even crossed my mind. I never heard of her ever again.”

Both father and son drank mouthfuls in the ensuing silence.

“Do you still love her?” Will asked softly.

“Some people are wired to love many, Will. One after the other, each equally dear. Not me. I never managed to forget one detail about her. How she laughed, the colour of her eyes, her hair as it dried curly after she took a swim. In a way, she never left me, and I never stopped loving her.”

Will bent his head towards the radio, and listened to the soulful violin solo- He didn’t know what the piece was called, or who had composed it, but it felt familiar all the same. Homely.

“I always thought,” Beau started again, a contemplative quality to his voice, “that if you were to ever take after me, it would be the booze.”

“I am not what anyone would call sober, dad,” Will murmured. Especially not now. He was way past tipsy.

“No. But you got all my sad bastard genes too, of all things” came the gruff reply. “You coulda gotten my devilishly good looks and strong build, but nooo. You had to go for the sad bastard genes.”

“And your taste in partners, I suppose,” Will added, silently confirming his dad’s suspicions.

“And that,” Beau shook his head before he took another mouthful of whiskey. “Should I expect a grandchild to be dropped at my door anytime soon?”

“No, she’s dead,” Will’s voice broke on the last word, and he tried to hide it by drinking. Not drinking anymore was the rational choice here, but Will told it to fuck off and leave him alone.

“Your girlfriend?” Beau asked, and Will saw the misunderstanding.

“No, no. Your granddaughter,” he huffed. “Her father killed her mother, he was going to kill her too, so I killed her father. Me and my psychiatrist became her guardians, and then he killed her, fed me her ear, and blamed her death on me.”

Crickets joined the violin solo. Will felt his father’s wide eyes on him, so he turned his head to meet the gaze with a watery smile.

“And this partner you mentioned,” Beau drawled, accent heavy both with booze and incomprehension. “Is it *him*, the psychiatrist?”

“Never was my partner, but yeah,” Will said. Put like this, it was all so very funny. He chuckled. “Played me like a fiddle, really. I must have sounded just like this,” he pointed down at the radio with one slack hand.

“Well, I’ll be damned,” Beau whispered. He turned fully towards Will then. “Willy, boy, are you in danger?”

“No, I don’t think so,” Will replied in between chuckles. “He framed me for his murders, and then arranged for my acquittal. He doesn’t need me anymore, which is as safe as anyone can be, I s’pose.”

Beau rubbed at this mouth with his palm. He looked so sober all of a sudden.

“Oh, daddy, no,” Will reached for him and in his endeavour, the bottle slipped from his fingers, instantly forgotten on the grass. Aiming for a hand but grabbing a forearm, Will hurried to soothe. “I never would have come here if I thought he would harm you. You are safe, totally. You ruined your organs with booze and smoke by now, he would not be interested.” Another round of laughter took him then.

“A smoke sounds good right now,” Beau said, and slipped from Will’s grip to fetch it. “Want one?”

“Yes,” Will reached for the packet, but Beau took one fag out to hand it to him, lighting it himself too. “This is the best protection against him, I think. More so than dog hair and motor oil. Though they worked charms, too.”

Beau sank into his chair with a resigned air, but cogs were turning fast in his mind. “What’s he like?” he asked.

“Oh you’d hate him,” Will sighed, detecting his lost bottle on the floor and retrieving it to carry on. “So prim and proper. Parts his hair on the side. Three piece suits, pocket square and all. He might be pattern-blind, or at least colour blind. It hurt to look at him sometimes.” Will paused to reconsider. “He managed to make it work, somehow. I would look like a clown in that same getup.”

Beau made a noncommittal sound, and waited for more. Will didn’t disappoint.

“Has an accent. Funny, you know, I never asked where he was from. I’m guessing ex-Soviet, but who knows. Even the accent might be fake. Most things about him are,” he hiccupped. “That slimy bastard.” The last part was muttered under his breath, but Beau heard him anyway.

“And you love him?” Beau asked. The parallels between their questions that night did not escape his suddenly sober mind.

Will turned to look at him, face scrunched up a little, looking so much like the boy he used to be. “Freely, purely, and with passion,” came the reply, and Beau’s heart broke for the second time in his life.

“Oh, Willy,” he said. He could say no more.

He let the radio play until Will’s snores reached him, his half-smoked fag long waned on the floor and the now-empty bottle at risk of falling once again. He knew enough about life to know that similar fates of fathers and sons was not only a literary theme but a fact of life. He just did not find it fair for his bright boy to end up like him.

He poked at Will’s side and pushed him until he found his way to the couch. Leaving a jug of water by his side, Beau went to his room for a sleepless night.

*

It took Will two weeks before he managed to meet his father’s eyes again.

He did not remember everything they said that night in the correct order, but he remembered enough bits and pieces in time to be *mortified* with his loose tongue. He hadn’t touched another whiskey bottle since then.

Granted, Beau Graham exceeded expectations of his parenting skills once again. Will thought he had a long rant coming about, oh, where to start? The one-sided homosexual romance? The murders of his platonic love? The being-framed-for-said-murders? The heavily implied *cannibalism*?

Instead, he was met with the same underhanded care and acceptance as before. Only this time, there was also the addition of Beau’s shotgun strategically placed by the front door, new locks installed on doors and windows, as well as -surprise surprise- a passable motion sensitive security system that Beau activated at night, after both of them returned from work if they had any.

Overall, none would work well against Hannibal Lecter, but the sentiment behind it all was taken by Will like water to dry land. He began to put more effort to cooking for Beau, ignoring the ache in his gut each time he used a trick or technique he learned from Hannibal. He also spent time on repairing things around the house that Beau felt too lazy to bother with.

This time it was the upstairs sink. It was leaking, but the interval between two drops was too long to make it an urgent project. The afternoon sun was ridiculously hot in the small bathroom with the large, overhead window, and Will was soaked with sweat as he bent beneath the sink, reaching for the damn cog hidden away all the way back.

“Who the fuck designed this,” he swore under his breath and tried again.

That was when he heard it: Something heavy falling down, and his father’s brawl voice (intimidating and resonant) rising steadily.

“-again, and I won’t be this soft on ya-”

Will managed to extract himself from under the sink without hitting his head, and stormed down the stairs and through the front door, only to find- To find- What was undoubtedly the

most surreal thing he ever saw, and for a guy who spent half a year hallucinating about stags and murder, that said something.

Hannibal Lecter was sitting on grass on their front yard. His impeccable suit had grass stains and wrinkles on it. He had one hand touching the side of his head, and an expression of absolute incomprehension as he looked up at Beau, who was standing one step away with the shovel he was using to plant fresh basil and thyme -as per Will's request- now brandished as a weapon.

"Go back!" Beau barked at Will the moment he saw him, in what was unknowingly a spot on Jack Crawford impersonation. Their street was run down and usually not very crowded, but the few people who were there (oh god, *neighbours*) were staring. Will had to intervene before one of them called the cops or worse, took out a phone and pressed record.

"Dad," he said in what he thought was a pretty calm voice. At this, both men turned to look at him properly for the first time. Will put his hands up, palms visible, using every tactic in the book to diffuse the situation. "Put that down. Please." He glanced down at Hannibal, and immediately felt less accommodating. "You, get up. As if you can't take a hit. Come on, up."

It was Hannibal's compliance more than Will's request that snapped Beau out of his murderous stance. He lowered the shovel, and after a quick check of their small audience, he pushed past Will and into the living room. Hannibal looked after him warily, but at Will's quick snap of his fingers, turned indignant.

"Did you just-"

"Get in, why don't you," Will said from between his teeth, the smile he tried on for the sake of the neighbours coming across more like a snarl.

Without comment, Hannibal went inside, and Will shut the door behind them with a breath of relief. It was too soon, of course.

"You *dare* come to my home, huh?" Beau snarled. Will quickly calculated how long Hannibal would need to tear into his father's throat, and hastily stepped between them.

"Okay, everybody is going to calm the fuck down," he said, not very calm himself but stern enough to gather their attention again. "We are going to be civilized, and nobody is going to die today." He hoped that last part would prove to be more than wishful thinking.

"Dad," he said, "This is Doctor Hannibal Lecter." He did not remember giving his father a name to go with the murderous persona, but it did not seem to have been enough.

"I don't care what he does or what his name is," Beau spat out. "I saw the suit and heard the accent, I know exactly who-"

"And Hannibal," Will hurried, "This is my father, Beau Graham. He has been chain-smoking and drinking since he was old enough to reach the top shelves," Will said, in an effort to get it across that Beau was *off the fucking limits*. Hannibal's blank face twitched subtly, and Will knew the bastard was holding back a smile.

“Just say what you want to say, and leave,” Will told him.

“To be perfectly honest-” Will scoffed, but Hannibal carried on as if he didn’t, “I cannot choose where to begin. There are so many delightful points to touch upon.”

“Touch upon the gash on your head first,” Beau snapped, and Will had enough.

“Alright. Dad, you are staying here. We,” he gestured towards Hannibal, “are going to take this somewhere else.”

“Will-”

“He came during the day, dad. He left witnesses,” Will reminded. “Although that might somehow have been for his own benefit, but for now let’s take it as a gesture of goodwill.”

“Indeed,” Hannibal agreed. A line of blood was slowly making its way down the side of his face. “My intention was only ever to talk to Will, and to do so peacefully.”

“It’s a miracle he can understand a word you say,” Beau said. “You say five words where one’d be enough. Who do you think you are fooling, huh?”

“I would never presume to fool you, or Will. Both of you seem to see through my ruse effortlessly.” It was definitely a smile on his face this time, and Will breathed through his nose to gather some patience.

“Just for that, I will not clean that wound.” He nodded towards the front door with an after-you gesture, and Hannibal nodded. Just as they were through the threshold, Beau called after them.

“If I don’t hear from Will in two hours,” he said, and he sounded not like a father or a hardworking man, but a cold-blooded murderer himself. “I will hunt you down.” The threat sounded unfinished, but both Will and Hannibal heard the rest as if it was shouted in their faces. Will found even more respect for the man.

“It won’t be necessary, dad. He is the most self-preserving person I know,” Will’s assurance was meant to work doubly as a threat as well. Hannibal’s eyes were bright as he looked at Will. “I’ll be back soon,” Will said, and with that, he shut the door.

“I hope you have a good reason for this,” he murmured as he led the way.

“As a matter of fact, I do,” said Hannibal, sounding awfully satisfied with himself as he took out his pocket square and made a show of wiping the trail of blood. Will did that snarl/smile thing again, the watchful gaze of the neighbours like weights on his back.

“You must know that I know many ways to kill and hide the body. They wouldn’t find a piece of you,” he said, a soft murmur to go along with his attempt at appearing innocuous. “I wouldn’t care how many people you let see you take a beating. I would end you.”

“Dear Will,” Hannibal sighed, but Will resolutely kept his gaze ahead. “There is not a moment that slips my mind.”

“How did you find here, anyway?” Will asked shortly, unwilling to dwell on the meaning of that statement.

“I had access to files for the Ripper,” Hannibal reminded him. “Including those of the investigators.”

“My dad was not an investigator,” Will deadpanned.

“No. After finding his name, my search might have become decidedly less legal.”

“What did you do, hack into his personal files? Bribe an officer?”

“I believe it is early yet for me to give up all my secrets, Will.”

Will left that one hang in the air as he silently led them through the shortcuts to a nearby copse. After he helped Beau buy the house, this had become his favourite spot whenever he visited. It was far enough from the nearest house to offer privacy, and dense enough in fauna to dispel joggers and picnic enthusiasts. He anticipated Hannibal’s probable discomfort as he waded into the copse first, making sure to let go of low branches suddenly. Only a small, indignant sniff rewarded his efforts, and he regretted not turning back to see Hannibal Lecter being hit in the face by the underbrush.

“What a cruel boy you are,” Hannibal said when Will stopped at a relatively plain patch of land. He brushed off his shoulders and a couple of leaves fell off. Will could not help but openly smile.

“I learned from the best,” he jabbed.

“Your father?” Hannibal asked innocently. Will felt the laughter in his throat, and diverted quickly to avoid giggling with Hannibal Lecter in a sweltering Louisiana woodland behind his house.

“Talk.”

Hannibal looked around for a place to sit, and was visibly disappointed when he found none. That transference of emotion, coupled with the grass stains on his back, made Will suddenly realize that if he could read Hannibal, it was because Hannibal wanted to be read. What this entailed -further manipulation? Sincerity? Concussion?- was yet unclear.

“On our last conversation, you told me I should have asked you whether you were ready. Whether you could accept me. I thought about that in length, Will, and came to the conclusion that I could not have asked you anything. It would have jeopardized my cover, and had your affinity for me been unfounded, I would have effectively put myself in prison.”

“So you put me there instead.” It was a statement, but Hannibal nodded anyway, no remorse to be found.

“Yes, I did. My goals were for lifelong fulfilment rather than short-term satisfaction; therefore, my plans were suitably flexible. I was playing the long game, as the saying goes.”

Will refused him eye contact and kept his eyes on Hannibal's chin. Still, he could tell that this was him projecting honesty. Will was duly guarded as Hannibal continued.

"In our time together, Will, I witnessed the darkness in you. You denied it, you punished yourself for delighting in it, you tried to overcompensate by working yourself to the bone for Jack. I watched you, and I wanted you to be free of the restraints you put yourself in. The vision of you, wild and free, became my white whale just like the Ripper did for Jack." Hannibal took a small, cautious step forward, and Will stayed put, arms crossed and scowl firmly in place.

"I justified my acts on what they would accomplish. I believed that if you broke, putting you together in accordance to my vision would be worth your suffering. Because then it would matter not how much you suffered in the past, but how much you would enjoy the future. Then you could accept me entirely."

"It should not even be worth mentioning, seeing as you are a selfish prick, but for someone wanting unconditional acceptance, you are awfully hypocritical." Will was proud of himself for the steadiness of his voice. And to Hannibal's credit, he did not react to the insult, not even with an eye twitch.

"I am self-serving, Will. I know what I want, and stop at nothing to ensure that I get it. I wanted you by my side, coated in blood as you looked at me with devotion, just as I would look at you, and I did not stop to see how devoted you were to me already."

"Is that what I was?" Will mused, and watched carefully for any sudden movements as Hannibal took another step towards him.

"Isn't it? Why else would you not declare from rooftops that-" A pause, and then, "that I am the Chesapeake Ripper?" Will's eyes grew wider at that. It was a confession, one for which Jack would sacrifice a thousand Miriams and Williams without a blink. *It's a gift*, a voice whispered at the back of Will's mind. *He's giving you a rare gift.*

"Why else would you leave?" Hannibal asked, tone softer now. "If you stayed, either me or Jack would have dragged you back into the investigation. You would have to choose a side, or perish in indecisiveness. If you chose Jack, it would mean you would try to take away my life, or at the very least, my freedom. If you chose me, as you saw me then, you would commit yourself to someone who would not value you for yourself, but for what use you could be to him. So you left, and in that, you protected me. I can see, now, that yours wasn't an act of cowardice or avoidance. You acted out of a desire to protect me, even though I could not entirely appreciate your sacrifice. And what can that be called, if not devotion?"

Will took a deep breath to center himself, but released it too soon when he saw Hannibal take another step forward. "Stop right there," he said. He did not want Hannibal to get any closer to him in case all this was a ploy to get him compliant, only for Will to end up bleeding out on the forest floor. That would mean his father would be next, and Will Graham was nothing if fiercely protective of those he cared about. That was one of the things, if Hannibal had spoken honestly, that he got right about Will.

Hannibal stopped immediately. His eyes, in Will's peripheral vision, burned bright still.

“The most beautiful quality of a true friendship is to understand and be understood with absolute clarity,” he said. “Have I understood you, Will? Do you understand me now?”

“I do understand that rejecting you would mean you would have to eliminate me, which undermines the goal of this heart-to-heart, wouldn’t you say, Dr. Lecter?”

Hannibal surprised him and smiled. It was a toothy smile as well, the crooked lines of his teeth giving him a boyish quality in the light of the descending sun.

“But you are not afraid of me. You never were, were you Will? You even advised me to kill you, back in Wolf Trap. That was not the act of a man who would be intimidated by the promise of violence. No. If I were to attack you, you would fight me tooth and nail. I think you would even enjoy it.”

“You think, you guess, you *presume*. You don’t know.”

“You are right, of course,” Hannibal conceded with a nod. “That is the reason we are in this predicament, after all. I survived, and I thrived, all my life, because I trusted my intuition and deductive capabilities. It saw me through thick and thin. However, it is very clear to me now, that I also had fortune on my side; both for previously giving me predictable masses to overcome, and for presenting me with you in all your chaotic glory.”

“Fortune favours the bold,” Will quipped, “and yet I still haven’t heard you ask anything.”

“A lapse in need of immediate rectification,” Hannibal replied, and with a deep breath, started. “Here I am, Will. I have sinned against you countless times. I used you and abused you, and took from you with unending appetite. And yet I did it all, so that we could stand as equals, side by side, the world trembling beneath our feet as we lived as gods. I did it all, so I could have you in my arms, blood on your skin shining black in moonlight. Here I am before you, as bare as I know how to be, with my promise to never try to presume your mind, and I am asking you, Will Graham. Do you want me? Do you want us? Can you find it in yourself to forgive me?”

Will held his breath. Hannibal was a sight to behold as shadows of leaves fluttering in the wind fell upon his face. He looked earnest, eyes bright, expression stuck on cautiously hopeful as though preserved in amber thousands of years ago. He still held the distance Will requested, but Will could see in the slight jerking of his hands and feet that it was taking a considerable bit of control to do so. Against his own yearning to just let go, he let his eyes glaze over slightly, and let the pendulum swing.

“You would not have done this if I hadn’t rejected you,” Will murmured. “This is not a selfless act.”

“I am not a selfless creature,” came the silent reply. “If the sacrifice you required to stand by my side was that I lay waste to the world, I would do that. Instead, you required honesty, and even though I find the latter much harder, I will do it.”

Will shuddered.

In the past, he could see possible paths before such momentous decisions. What would happen if he did this or said that, all would be more or less conceivable in his eyes. Now, try as he might, the only path he could see was leading him into Hannibal's anxious arms. He could already feel the breath warm on his neck, the arms heavy and strong around him, the body solid and as capable of great acts of violence as tenderness and care. After his decades in life, and especially as a result of the recent betrayals that left him smarting, it was ingrained within Will to second-guess everything that made up this tremulous moment in time. But no matter how hard he pushed himself to see the deception, he came up empty. All there was right now was Will, Hannibal, and how bright they'd burn if they touched.

"Yes," Will said. Hannibal looked at his eyes with such ardour. His eyes were really beautiful. "And yes," he added. Hannibal blinked, slowly. "And. Yes." Will said, and before he could draw breath, he found himself on his back, and Hannibal on top, and their lips mashed together so passionately that he felt lightheaded with the force of the feeling. A loud moan escaped him when Hannibal bit at his bottom lip hard enough to break the skin, and others followed as Hannibal sucked the blood greedily. Will reached up to hold his head still, and used his lips to open Hannibal's, their tongues meeting to share the taste of blood.

Hannibal groaned. He was supporting himself on one elbow beside Will's head, while his other hands had slipped under his shirt and was gripping on his side tightly. "Will," he breathed, again with such reverence, that Will spread his legs, letting Hannibal settle against him much more comfortably. At the first thrust, groin to groin, both feeling how aroused the other was with no space for doubt, Will tore his lips from Hannibal's in a bid to collect himself enough to say something. He was going to say something, and it was important, but what it was evaded him.

Instead he held Hannibal tightly against his neck, and shivered when he felt a long lick, from where his t-shirt ended to his earlobe, where Hannibal alternated between sucking and nibbling it. "Hngh," Will breathed, his legs closing around Hannibal's thrusting hips and encouraging him to be closer, mindless of his shoes and turned on beyond belief that Hannibal did not care enough about the state of his clothes to slow down even a little bit.

Will grinned up to the canopy of trees as a bruise was sucked just below his chin, just as turned on by it as the grass stains on Hannibal's clothes, which he could not see in all their glory from his vantage point.

Wait.

"Wait," Will breathed, but Hannibal did not appear to have heard him. Will pressed his shoed feet to Hannibal's thighs sharply to get his attention, but was rewarded by a growl, a quickening rhythm, and another kiss.

"My dad," Will managed when he could tear himself from those lips again. "We have to go back,"

"We have to do no such thing," Hannibal murmured into his ear, his attention now on the other side of Will's neck, hips showing no signs of slowing down.

“He’ll come looking,” Will said, meaning to sound serious but managing to sound breathy instead. He tried again. “Hannibal, I don’t-”

“Say it again,” Hannibal demanded roughly, pulling back slightly to look at Will with eyes so dark, they might as well have been black all along.

“What?” Will asked, finding it once again hard to concentrate with Hannibal’s hips between his thighs and those eyes on his.

“My name,” Hannibal said, taking his hand from Will’s side to work his fingers into Will’s curls and holding on tight. “You don’t say it enough. Say my name, Will.”

“Hannibal,” Will said, and watched as something snapped in Hannibal. The man’s eyes closed, lids stuttering as though he wanted to keep them open but couldn’t, and his pace quickened. He was close, Will knew, because so was he, and if the almost brutal quality to their combined efforts was any indication, it wouldn’t be long before they came rubbing against each other in their clothes like teenagers. The thought was hot, but Hannibal getting shot on top of him by his father was not.

“Stop,” he said, and what do you know, that was the magic word. Hannibal groaned in dismay but obeyed. “We are going back. Time’s almost up,” he tried to get his breathing under control. “He’ll come looking,” he repeated.

“No, darling, he won’t,” Hannibal said, and did nothing to remove himself from Will’s person aside from disentangling his finger’s from Will’s hair and leaning on both his elbows. “He’ll be too busy.”

It was like a short circuit in Will’s brain, those words taking on a sinister quality as they registered, even though Hannibal was sweaty upon him, gazing down at him with a kind of quiet contentment and appreciation. Will pushed him off, and rolled away, getting to his feet so fast it was dizzying for a moment.

“What does that mean?” he hissed, “Hannibal, I swear to god, if you’ve done something to him-”

With an indignant sigh, which some might even describe as a snort if it was done by anyone but Hannibal, the man likewise rose to his feet. “I may not be known for my stellar moral conduct, Will,” he said as he brushed off bits of leaves and fodder from his forearms, “but even I would not find a rightful place for patricide in your courtship.”

“You killed Abigail,” Will said, eyeing Hannibal with suspicion but also somewhat assured by his words. It *would* be in complete contrast to their previous conversation to hurt Will so, *unless this whole thing was another twisted game where Hannibal would take sick pleasure in breaking him further-*

“I am aware that I abused your trust,” Hannibal said. He approached Will, one hand pointing towards the way they came. “I intend to win it back fully, even more than I want to see you lose yourself under me here. Let us go back now.”

Will took a deep breath, and ignored the *stab* of want those words created as he followed Hannibal out of the copse. He was not about to turn his back to him now, not when cryptic and thoughtful statements worked their best to confuse him in regards to Hannibal's intentions. A part of him thought himself skittish and silly to doubt Hannibal so much after the day they had, but another, equally strong part was screaming *caution!*

Hannibal needed no directions as he led them back to the street where Beau's house was. It was a testament to the man's sense of direction and strong memory more than any previous knowledge of the area, but Will was tense and silent as they walked. The sun had set as by the time they arrived, and under the darkening blue sky, no neighbours were out to see Will looking utterly wrecked and messy, with Hannibal looking confident and much more composed in comparison. Small miracles, Will thought, and only as they approached the front door did he take the lead.

"I wanted this to be a much more pleasant experience for you," Hannibal's statement stopped him with his hand in the air, reaching for the door handle. Will looked over his shoulders to find him smirking. Hands brushed across his back, presumably to make him appear more presentable for whatever was going on inside. Will's muscles hurt as he struggled against the desire to break down the door, but the soft lines on Hannibal's face illuminated by the light from the living room -which was a good sign, the lights were on- halted him. "Alas, your agitation is my own doing, and thus, I have no grounds to complain."

The moment hands retreated from his back, Will opened the door. The living room was empty regardless of having the lights on, but he could hear his father's soft voice coming from the back of the house. A breath of relief left Will as he confirmed that, yes, his father was alive, he was not too late, before he strode off towards the sound.

When Will took a step into the back yard, he found himself considering, for the second time that day, whether encephalitis made a return.

The two folding chairs, same ones Will and his dad used weeks ago for their drunken heart-to-heart, were occupied. On one, his father was sat, exactly as one would expect him to be in a pleasant evening such as this, relaxed and smiling slightly as he had a chat. On the other chair sat, with a silk neckerchief and eyes that lit up upon seeing Will, was Abigail.

"Will," both Beau and Abigail greeted him at the same time, but only she smiled widely and continued to say, "Hi."

Will was stuck where he was, one hand supporting him against the doorframe. He took in the beer bottles in their laps -*no hard liquors for or with young ladies*, Beau's gruff voice sounded in Will's mind- the flush on both their faces at the warm summer evening -*healthy and alive*- the radio by their feet on the ground between them playing something with beats overriding lyrics -*I'm just a holy fool, oh baby, it's so cruel but*-

"Breathe, love," came Hannibal's silent demand from behind, his breath hot on Will's ear. He did take a shuddery breath, not realizing he had not been breathing until it was pointed out. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

The smug amusement in Hannibal's tone was what broke Will out of his state, and also what led him to elbow him in the nose, effectively breaking it with a wet crunch.

"That's my boy!" Beau's delighted cheer was mixed with Abigail's "Oh my god!" and Hannibal's gasp. Will turned to find him with his hands on his knees, crouched forward, and watching the blood drip down his nose onto the floor.

"Fuck you," Will hissed. Hannibal looked up at him with his widest grin yet, and had the audacity to wink.

"Patience," he said, and Will decided enough attention was given to Hannibal that day. He started towards Abigail, who stood up and stepped into his embrace, still holding the neck of the beer bottle with one hand.

"I missed you, Will," she murmured into his shoulder, and Will swallowed harshly to keep himself from crying in front of everyone. If she was bothered by how tightly he was holding her, she refrained from mentioning it, but eventually she did push him back a bit, nose scrunched up -*adorably*- as she said, "You stink."

That startled a laugh out of Will and Beau, whose brand of showing Will affection was also by rude declarations on his personal hygiene. "I like her," Beau said with an air of finality. Just like that, Will knew that he was given *everything* he wanted.

"Sorry," he released Abigail. "I'll take a shower," he added to his father now.

"Burn those clothes while you're at it," Beau said, a disapproving gaze taking Will in. Will could only imagine what he looked like. Beau's gaze shifted to somewhere behind Will, and his lips curled in distaste. "His too," he said lowly, and Will felt his blush come on with a staggering force, burning him down to his fucking chest.

"Right," he stammered, and with all the dignity he could muster up, walked inside, grabbing Hannibal by the bicep and dragging him upstairs.

"One after the other!" Beau's warning shout followed them on their way to the bathroom. "Take turns, you hear me!" Abigail's giggle was the last thing they heard before Will shut the door. He pushed Hannibal, not kindly, to perch on the edge of the bathtub, and took out the first aid kit from the tiny cabinet by the sink. The vicinity of the sink itself was still littered with tools, his repair work abandoned a mere couple hours ago. Will felt it was much, much longer.

Hannibal was leaning forward and breathing through his mouth, but he was watching Will with intense eyes. He accepted the clean towel Will pushed into his hands, and proceeded to hold it to his nose.

"I hope it heals crooked," Will said, taking out iodine and gauze and beginning to roughly clean the cut on the side of Hannibal's head.

"I aligned it already," Hannibal said, his voice muffled by the towel, and nasal. Combined with the accent, it had a rather disarming effect on Will, who softened his touch. "There will

be many more opportunities for you to put your mark on me, darling, not to worry.”

Will snorted. “Figures you’d like it rough,” he teased, reaching for the adhesive bandages to seal the wound. “Hannibal…”

“I wanted to surprise you,” Hannibal said, lowering the towel after checking that the blood flow had stopped. Their eyes met.

“You did,” Will said softly. Both Hannibal’s wounds treated to the best of their abilities for the moment, he put everything back to the kit and put it away, tossing the bloodied towel to the laundry basket. “If you have any more surprises, though, now would be the time to tell me. Go with the theme of the day.”

“Nothing as impressive, and nothing that cannot wait,” Hannibal said. Will reached for his battered jacket and started to unbutton it.

“Spill it,” he urged when Hannibal proceeded to watch him instead of talking. With a sigh, he relented.

“It might be the case that Dr. Chilton was arrested as the Chesapeake Ripper,” he said nonchalantly. Will’s hands stopped on their way to help him out the jacket, so Hannibal shook it off himself. “He was found with the corpse of one of his patients, sans a few limbs. More compelling evidence was found all over his home, too. It baffled Jack how he could have hidden under the FBI’s nose for so long. But in the end, justice prevailed, so he is content.”

“You…” Will squeezed his eyes shut and listened to Hannibal’s clothes rustle as the man took off his vest as well, moving onto unbuttoning his dress shirt. “You are unbelievable.” Will stared down at his smirking lips. “You gave up your work? To that buffoon?”

If Will was asked to describe the smile he was given then, he might be tempted to call it besotted. After checking that Hannibal was safely out of earshot.

“I admit, Will, that you were much more preferable to carry my legacy,” came the soft reply. “But needs must. I am much more than the Ripper,” he added lowly, and Will felt himself becoming aroused at the darkness the tone promised. “And I am a man on a mission.”

“What mission?” Will breathed out. He let himself step closer to Hannibal, and was subtly directed to stand between his legs. The shirt was open, the sliver of flesh and hair of his chest just as mesmerising to Will as the adoring expression turned up towards him.

“The details are unclear as of yet,” Hannibal said, his hands finding Will’s shirt and slipping under it to hold his waist. “After all, you and I are to ask these things to each other now. I shall not move forward without your express, informed consent.” The hands went higher slowly, and Will’s breath caught when he felt thumbs on his nipples teasing him slowly. Hannibal smiled. “There is one aspect to my mission that will remain unalterable, I’m afraid.”

“Hmm?”

“Yes, quite. You, me and Abigail will have to be together for the foreseeable future. At some point she will have to go to college, if she so desires, from which point on you and I will be together, indefinitely.” Hannibal used his ankles to get Will closer, his breath now warming Will’s chest as he spoke. He waited for Will to nod before continuing. “Then there are things I will work relentlessly to accomplish. I want us to hunt. I want to see you delirious in your bloodlust, like a primordial god amongst the mortals. I want to make it clear to us and the rest of the world that you are mine, as I am yours. I want to cook for you, feed you, and see to all your needs, which you will not hide from me. I want to show you the world and watch as you thrive.” His silent words rang inside the small bathroom as a prayer would in a cathedral. It felt sacred, like a vow. Hannibal watched Will’s face for a while, and pleased with whatever he found there, he added, “I also want you to change your aftershave. It really has an atrocious smell.”

Will laughed, his chest moving under Hannibal’s possessive grip.

“You might, of course, argue against these to your heart’s wish, but must expect strong opposition on my part.”

“What about the things I want? In addition, I mean.” Will held Hannibal’s face in both his hands, both to anchor himself to the present and simply because now, he could.

“Regardless of the deficiencies humankind has spotted therein, we appear to have decided on a democracy for us.” Hannibal rubbed his cheek against Will’s hand like an overgrown jungle cat. Will smirked at the association.

“A forum for a house, with a chlamys over your suits?”

“What a peculiar vision,” Hannibal said, hiding his smirk by leaning forward and pressing a kiss to Will’s chest through the t-shirt. “We can talk about it later, if you wish.”

Will laughed again. It felt weird to be this carefree in Hannibal’s presence, but he had a feeling that this was going to be normal for them from now on. That Hannibal, apex predator that he was, was prone to playfulness when he felt he had no need for his person suit. It was so endearing a sight to see, in fact, that Will used his grip to tilt Hannibal’s face up, and leaned down for a kiss, both to seal the deal and, again, because he *could*.

“Guys,” came Abigail’s voice through the door. Will stopped, their lips a touch away from each other. “I’m doing what I can but if one of you does not come out, he said he will personally come to drag you out.”

“I’m coming,” Will called out, stuck between just kissing Hannibal and leaving the room.

“That’s what I was afraid of,” replied Abigail, which decided it for Will instantly. He tore the door open to find her smirking. She bent a bit to give a wave to Hannibal. Whether he waved back or not, Will did not get to find out because he closed the door behind himself on his way out.

“You take the first turn,” he called instead, and let Abigail lead him back downstairs. Her hand around his, warm and a bit sweaty, but completely and undeniably alive, was a novel

feeling. She did not take him to the porch back to Beau, but to the kitchen. Will was content to watch her.

“I went to the Bentley to get clothes for him. I’ll take it to him in a minute,” she said as she wetted a piece of paper towel at the sink. She came back to him, and started to rub it at his face. “After I make sure you look less like you were ravished in the wild, of course.”

“Oh my god,” Will let out, remembering his bitten-bloody lip, his funky hair, and oh, the bruises around his neck, which his t-shirt could do absolutely nothing to cover. “I’m so sorry,” he said, remembering that Abigail had another few years before she could legally purchase alcohol.

“For what? I’m not,” she said, setting the used towel aside to pick up dirt from his hair. “He tried so hard to hide it, but I did not grow up with my father without learning to read people. He was sad when you left. It’s just... nice, to see you both happy.”

“It’s nice to see you alive,” he said, hesitantly moving her hair back to see the scar where her ear used to be.

“Well,” she shrugged. “It could have been worse.” And it could have been, Will knew. Had Will acted any differently, Hannibal would have adjusted his plans for them both accordingly. It would have been unpredictable, and almost certainly devastating.

“He is dangerous,” Will murmured. But instead of appearing scared or intimidated, Abigail gave him a big, knowing smile, made to look a bit unsettling on her Mall-of-America features.

“But we are not so tame either, are we, Will? In fact,” she said, walking around him to swish his shirt and oh god, pants, off of clutter. “We would not be here if he thought us meek. He likes us for our claws and teeth,” she said, and clacked her teeth a couple of times. He was filled with a sudden burst of affection for her, and he did not fight it. Turning back to hold her again, he said, “I’m so glad you are alright.”

“I will be better after you shower,” she teased once more, but it was her this time who clung on tight. “Will?”

“Yes, Abigail?”

“I want to see France,” she said, her eyes big and suspiciously innocent when he drew back to look at her. “Just in case it comes up soon.”

Will smirked at her, admittedly not very veiled, attempt at manipulation. “Well, you have a right to vote,” he said, feeling strangely giddy at the inside joke Abigail had yet to be included in. “But I still appreciate your attempt at lobbying.”

She shook her head like she was being very patient with a small child. “I better take him his clothes, she said, and as she picked up a handbag by the stairs, she paused. With raised eyebrows, she asked, completely serious, “Unless you’d like him to wander here naked?”

She then laughed at him choking on his spit, and went up, entirely remorseless. Will adored her.

His father, when Will joined him on the back yard, was lighting a fag. Will took one himself when he offered, and occupied the other chair.

“It has been decades,” Beau started, the smoke coming out from both his nose and mouth, making him appear dragon-like in the dim light. “since I heard laughter in my home, Will.” Will stayed silent. “It’s good,” Beau continued, “would have been better if I didn’t owe it to *him*, though.”

“You only have yourself to blame. Remember, your genes.”

“Ah yes,” Beau snorted. “My poor partner-choice genes. Well, Willy, I still did way better than you. Maddie never pretended to kill you and frame me for your murder.”

“I’d drink to that,” Will said, and grabbed the beer bottle his father tossed him in the air. He used the chair’s metal edge to open it. In the warmth of the evening, the cold beer tasted heavenly. “Thanks.”

“I guess you did well, too,” Beau said. For the first time since Will came back, he looked at him. “The girl tells me he’s not too bad.”

“I won’t hold my breath for you two to get along,” Will said with a smile only in his eyes. “But he has his moments.”

“I’ll still tell him I’ll kick his ass if he hurts you again,” Beau said, and Will took a second to appreciate him. He was calm now, whereas he had been ready to bash in Hannibal’s head a few mere hours ago, because he might have been an old man with arthritis and a couple of slipped discs, but he was Will’s father. He could be vicious if he had to be, to protect his family. Will could understand that without empathy, the same urge embedded within his psyche.

“You won’t tell me to stay away?” Will asked, suddenly the gangly boy he had been back then, when nightmares woke him up and led him to his dad.

“What good would it do?” Beau quipped. “I want you safe, kiddo, but I ain’t blind. I know family when I see one.” Another drag of the fag, another dragon breath released. Will looked, and saw.

“You are family,” he replied steadily.

“I am a *part* of *your* family.” Beau nodded. “You’ll visit your old man once in a while, won’t you, Will?”

“You couldn’t keep me away.” Will said. They brought their bottles up in a mock-cheers gesture. “Thank you, dad, for everything.”

“Pay me back by not getting in trouble,” Beau scoffed, and there was the gruff southern man once again. “Something tells me that, between the two of you, that’ll be hard enough.”

“I’ll be careful,” Will promised.

“Atta boy,” his dad replied, and that was that.

*

Dinner was a surreal affair.

That handbag of Hannibal’s apparently held a dark red henley with short sleeves, tight around the shoulders, and a pair of simple cotton pants that looked as though it was sewn onto his body. Will, dressed after his own shower in a baggy t-shirt with the collars slightly frayed, and comfortable worn jeans, felt underdressed in his own home. He also felt dangerously close to becoming aroused, but that was neither here nor there, especially with his dad and Abigail sitting on each side in the small kitchen table.

“Why don’t you help him?” Beau poked at him with an elbow grudgingly. His manners did not allow him to sit by as a guest cooked, but he was loathe to offer Hannibal any help himself. Will smiled as Hannibal replied for him.

“I am more than comfortable, thank you,” he said pleasantly, straightening from where he was checking the oven. He grabbed the battered lone kitchen glove, his face void of any distaste he might feel about the kitchen’s conditions. “This is more a favour to me, really. It is my pleasure to cook for you tonight.”

“He is something of a chef,” Abigail stage-whispered to Beau. “Kinda famous for his dinner parties. Always delicious. Well, almost always.”

Hannibal faltered momentarily with the hot tray in his hand, before carrying on to plate the food as if nothing happened. Will was intrigued.

“What do you mean, Abigail?” He asked, and was met with her mischievous expression.

“He did burn a meal or two when he came to visit me,” she said nonchalantly. Will immediately understood that she referred to the time he was “sad,” after Will’s departure. The vision of Hannibal staring at a less than perfect meal in disbelief and an undercurrent of anger burned itself into Will’s mind.

“Let us call it singed, Abigail,” came the carefree response, but Will heard the warning clearly. “Slightly more crisp than planned, rather.”

“I mean it was still good,” Abigail said in placation. “It was a memorable meal, is all I’m saying.”

Hannibal ignored her, and brought their plates to the table. “Fresh salmon, baked, with sliced potatoes and fennel leaves,” he introduced the meal. Lack of foreign words in Hannibal’s voice was a tiny bit disappointing, but as Will looked at the casual clothes, drying hair, and proud expression, he found he could not complain. At his father’s elbow poke, he tore his eyes away. Was this what being a teenager was supposed to have felt like?

Hannibal took his seat as well. "Please, begin," he said, and they did. It was delicious, but before Will or Abigail could say so, Beau spoke up.

"Holy shit," he said. "You made this in my kitchen, boy?"

Hannibal graciously did not comment on the swearing or the form of address. "I did," he said, bowing his head in -blatantly false- modesty. "And all with your ingredients."

"Well, I'll be damned," Beau said around another forkful.

"Thank you, Hannibal, it's delicious," Will said, partly to divert attention from his father. Violence, Hannibal could respect. Talking with an open mouth? Will did not want to tempt fate.

Hannibal smiled in reply and held his eyes. Neither went back to eating until Abigail very pointedly asked about what Will was doing here.

"I fix boat motors," he said, flustered to have been caught staring. "One-time stuff. There are a lot of docks here."

"And what do you do?" Beau gestured towards Hannibal with one hand. "My boy says you are a psychiatrist."

"I am," Hannibal replied, "And before that I was an ER surgeon."

"Why the change?"

Hannibal hesitated before he spoke. "I was bored," he said, instead of the usual excuse he gave about patients dying. "It did not offer the intellectual stimulation psychiatry did."

"Were all your patients interesting, like Will?"

"Dad," Will murmured, but was ignored by both as Hannibal said, "I'm afraid he proved to be spectacularly unique."

"*Spectacularly unique*," Beau repeated under his breath, but the mocking of the word choice was undermined by him taking in another forkful of the fish. "And you better not forget it."

"I would not dare," Hannibal replied gravely.

"That's wise," Beau said, "Wouldn't wanna get on his bad side. Do you remember that boy, Will, in middle school? Danny? Was it in Gulfport?"

"Biloxi," Will corrected. This was the most dreaded down side to introducing someone to family: Embarrassing childhood stories. He disguised his clenched jaw by taking another bite.

"Right. That boy was on Will's bad side from day one. Thought he could push my boy around, that brat."

Hannibal looked from Beau to Will, and back to Beau, but it was Abigail who prompted, “What happened?”

“They call me at work one day, ask me to come to the school. I go, and here’s my boy, bloody and bruised, glaring daggers at the principle. They got in a fight, the man tells me. Bad one. So bad that the other boy could not make it to the principal’s office.” Beau smirked at Will. Will felt all eyes on him as he reached for his glass of water.

“He soiled himself,” he said, “He waited in the toilet until his mom brought pants.”

Hannibal’s laughter was a thing of beauty. Will looked up to find him with his hands folded under his chin, looking, once again, besotted.

“I got my boy and we hit the road that night,” Beau said. “They might have pressed charges, and I was not about to let him come to harm. He’s all grown up now, but I have some fight left in me yet. If he doesn’t beat your ass up, I will,” he finished, the menacing air thickening as he and Hannibal regarded each other.

“I have no doubt about that. I even encourage it,” Hannibal replied at length. He turned his eyes back to Will. “I have a feeling that you will continue to keep me on my toes.”

The charged atmosphere was broken when Abigail giggled, one hand raising to hide her mouth. “I’m sorry, I just...”

“What?” Will asked.

“That was the shovel talk,” she said, with another fit of laughter. She touched the side of her head. “Get it? Shovel?”

“Well I am very thorough, aren’t I!” Beau laughed back, and Will shared a communicative look with Hannibal. *I like them alive*, Will’s said, and Hannibal’s replied, surprisingly enough, *Me too*.

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“I had an airbag somewhere,” Beau leaned in to whisper to Will as they did the dishes. “Don’t know if it still works, though. That and the couch. Don’t have a third bed, kid.”

“Oh.” It had slipped Will’s mind, with everything that went on, that it was night time and if they planned to stay here, arrangements had to be made. He carefully did not envision snuggling up to Hannibal on the narrow couch. “I’ll talk to them.”

“Go on, I got this,” Beau said, and pushed Will aside.

Abigail was sprawled on the armchair, her back on one side of it while her legs dangled over the other. She was flipping through the channels with a speed that suggested she was either very quick to recognize what she saw and chose to move on, or looking for something specific. Hannibal, unlike her, looked up when Will entered the living room. He had, on one hand, a bag of ice wrapped in a towel, which he kept to his swelling nose now. With his other hand, he patted on the empty space beside him on the couch, and Will went.

“So what’s the plan?” He asked, eyeing the distance between them instead of making eye contact.

“I was hoping we could leave,” Hannibal said. “I told Jack that I was carrying my practice over to Europe, to be with my family. And you’ll be proud to hear that it was not wholly dishonest. But I have no family left there.”

Will tentatively placed his hand next to Hannibal’s, and was pleasantly warmed when it was immediately held. “That word seems to come up often tonight.”

“Family?” Hannibal asked, just as softly. “But of course.”

Will shook his head. He was not yet accustomed to this, not entirely sure what it might mean for them. “Where in Europe?” he asked instead.

“I’d like to show you Florence. It is where I became a man.”

Will laughed, and finally met Hannibal’s eyes. “Do you hear yourself? That sounds so weird.”

“How so?” Hannibal took on an oblivious expression. “I gained a lot of experience there.”

“Stop.”

“My eyes opened to a whole new world of pleasurable possibilities,” Hannibal carried on.

“Knowing you, it was sexual as well as murderous.”

“Not at the same time, no.” They shared a smile. Abigail was suspiciously engrossed in her channel surfing.

“I don’t want to have to learn a new language just yet,” Will said. Hannibal tilted his head to the side in thought.

“You’d rather stay in the States?”

“Not exactly,” Will murmured. Subtly, he moved one inch towards Hannibal. Looking from under his eyelashes, he leaned in to say, “Je peux parler un peu de français.”

So close, it was impossible not to hear Hannibal gulp. “France?” he asked hoarsely.

“Why not? You are not wanted there, are you?” At this, Hannibal shook his head. “Abigail? What do you think about France?” Will asked, keeping his tone purely curious.

“Hmm?” Abigail turned to look at him, seemingly startled out of her reverie. “What, France? Sure, I mean, that’s fine,” she said with a one-shoulder shrug, and turned back to the TV.

Will knew then that she would make sure she was spoiled rotten by both of them. “See, she doesn’t mind,” he said to Hannibal.

“I don’t mind either,” Hannibal said eventually. “I will see to the arrangements.”

“When do you think we’ll leave?”

“It depends on the available flight, but I can’t see it would be later than the next two days.”

“Great,” Will said, mentally preparing a to-do list. His attention was demanded by a tightening of Hannibal’s hand around his. “Hmm?”

“What are you thinking, Will?” he asked, and Will knew the question was about their entire situation and not about current considerations of travel. Will gave it due consideration, the weight of Hannibal’s full attention soothing instead of irritating.

“I keep feeling that something will happen, and ruin this. Like I might wake up in the hospital, still being treated for encephalitis, or realize this was...” When he stalled, Hannibal squeezed his hand again, this time in support. “Like this was another game for you, and I’ll realize you’ve been fucking with me again.” He was blunt, he knew, but on the off-chance that they managed to make this work, he needed to be as honest as possible.

“After everything that happened,” Hannibal said slowly. “I understand why you would think that.” A pause. “I am not proud, for causing it.” Another pause. It was out of the ordinary, to see Hannibal think so long to pick his words. “I cannot turn back time, Will. That has been apparent to me for so long, regardless of how much I might want to do so. I cannot offer you more than my promises now, and my actions in the future, to prove myself to you.”

“That’s all I can ask, isn’t it?”

“And that’s what you will get. I keep my promises, Will.”

It should have sounded threatening. It would have been, some months ago. Right now, it made Will’s heart soar. He gently disentangled their hands and finally closed the distance between them, and placed his face into the crook of Hannibal’s neck. He smelled faintly of the drugstore shampoo and soap in the upstairs bathroom, and strongly of himself. Will sighed as Hannibal’s arm wrapped around his shoulders, not caring for the extra warmth and in fact, relishing it with closed eyes. He felt Hannibal’s content sigh on his face, and held on tight.

The next time he opened his eyes, it was because Hannibal was quietly saying, “No, Abigail and I saw a motel on our way here. We’ll stay there.”

Will found his father on the other armchair, the sister to the one Abigail used. Hannibal was still holding Will, and Will was still burrowed into him. Feeling self-conscious and wanting to hide it, he straightened up and quipped, “What, no five-star hotels? What if you get rashes on low thread count sheets?”

“The road to victory is paved with seedy motels, darling,” Hannibal said as he got up. “Good thing I have my eyes on the prize.” He said with a meaningful look at him. Will rolled his eyes, and Abigail groaned.

“It’s going to be like this from now on, isn’t it?” She reached for the handbag, now presumably home to Hannibal’s ruined suit. “This is what I signed up for.” She gave a long-suffering sigh and moved to the door. “See you later, Will. And Pops. Oh by the way, what’s your number?” She asked Beau, reaching for her pocket.

“Don’t have one,” Beau said. Abigail looked at him in incomprehension for a second, but then said “Oh, okay,” and left. Hannibal extended his hand to Beau for a handshake, which was, thankfully, received without objection.

“It was a pleasure to meet you,” Hannibal said, “I do hope to make a better impression in the future, though.”

“Keep cooking, then,” Beau said. Hannibal bent his head in acceptance.

“Will,” he said. “I will call you tomorrow. You do have your phone, don’t you?”

“I do,” Will said as he got up.

“Splendid,” Hannibal smiled, and with another lingering look at Will, he left.

“Splendid, he says,” Beau huffed, once the door was closed and they were alone in the living room. “Such big words, they get on my nerves. I bet he doesn’t even fish. No?” Will shook his head. “No, of course not. Honestly, Will.”

“You shouldn’t have told him to cook for you,” Will said. “He’ll take that as a challenge.”

“Let him. That was a fine meal.”

It really was. Will replayed moments from the dinner as well as the copse, and the bathroom, and the backyard and this very couch, and fell asleep on his makeshift bed with a smile on his face.

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The next morning, Will was nursing a cup of coffee in the silence of the house, Beau out already for a gig downtown. Will was trying to determine whether or not yesterday had been a fever dream when his phone beeped. The notification announced two photo attachments from an unlisted number. Frowning slightly, Will pressed open, and saw himself asleep in Hannibal’s arms on the couch. In the first one, Hannibal’s eyes were similarly closed, but the second one had him glaring at the camera. Will went back to the first one and marvelled at how at peace both of them looked, even with the angry swelling of Hannibal’s nose. Another notification popped up.

Beep. *He threatened to take my phone*

Beep. *He didn’t though*

Beep. *I’d like to see him try*

Beep. *I sent these to him too*

Beep. *He keeps taking out his phone to look*

Beep. *Thinks he's being so discreet lmao*

Beep. *A big softie underneath all that plaid <3*

Will laughed, and waited for the messages to stop before he replied.

Delete this conversation if you want to keep your phone, and please, organize your thoughts into one message. I still feel phantom vibrations in my hand.

And, at risk of not following his own advice, he sent another message.

Thank you though.

Beep. *Omfg softies all around*

Beep. *I'll never introduce you guys to my friends in France*

Beep. *You're embarrassing af*

Will made sure the pics were downloaded to his phone before he faced the day. His first stop was the small communications shop in town. He purchased a number, data package, and a phone for his father; a smartphone, to make up for all the years the man resisted even the brick phones. He then went to the dock workroom where he worked half the month and thanked the owner for his time. He said he would be out of the country, but passed his father's newly acquired number to him in case he needed help.

Back home, he set the new phone to charge and got back to work on the minimally leaking sink. It was then the bent latch of Beau's bedroom window, which did close but required a strong push to do so. Then he unclogged the kitchen sink pipe, which did drain but took its sweet time. He patched the broken fence in the backyard, cleared out the weeds in the front and back, and was in the process of finishing planting the basil and thyme on the front -Beau did not have the chance to continue after Hannibal interrupted and got bashed in the head-when his phone rang.

"Hello," he said, breath heavy as he wiped his brow with the shirt he had on.

"...Is this a bad time?" Hannibal asked, ever polite.

"No, no. I was... Gardening."

"Ah," came the reply. "The Graham men and their love for shovelling dirt know no bounds."

"Careful, that was almost self-deprecating," Will said, and cherished the slight huff it received. "Any news?"

"Yes. I found tickets for tonight, or technically, tomorrow morning at two am. It's a connecting flight, I'm afraid, but I assume we will pack light, so it shouldn't be too much of a problem."

“What if I want to bring five bags, or ten?” Will teased.

“Then you shall, darling,” was the quick response. “I cannot deny you your preposterous baggage, now, can I?”

“I am bringing a pretty big baggage, alright,” Will said. “It’s safely tucked in my head, though. No need to pay extra for them.”

“I wouldn’t want to appear vain,” Hannibal said and gave a pause for Will to fill with a disbelieving sound -which he did, he snorted inelegantly. When Hannibal continued, instead of offended, he sounded affectionate. “But I am rather strong. I can carry all you can dish out and more, my dear Will.”

“So is this how it’s going to be?” Will asked, previous humour lingering but dimmed in reflection.

“What do you mean?”

“You, using every chance to praise me, and creating opportunities of your own to do so if none is readily available?”

“I can certainly try to tone it down, use my praise sparingly, if you so wish. But that would effectively halve the time I speak, and as you know, I do so love the sound of my own voice.”

Will leaned some of his weight on the shovel as he looked, unseeingly, at the upturned pile of soil by his feet. “Remind me again what I’m thinking, running away with a narcissist?”

“I will spend the rest of my life reminding you, Will, if you allow me.”

“This is what I mean,” Will pressed on, his face red for more than the afternoon sun. “Do you enjoy making me embarrassed?”

“I enjoy making you blush,” came the quick response, the voice more suitable for the bedroom than a phone call in the middle of the day. “It makes me wonder how far down it goes.”

“Jesus, you can’t even see me now,” Will said. “If you’d led with this when we met, we’d have been married by now.” He regretted the words as they left their mouth, but it was too late now. Straining to hear Hannibal’s reaction, he listened but it was as though the line failed. “Hannibal?” He asked.

“I’m here,” Hannibal cleared his throat. “If my praise does quarter to you what that comment just did to me... But let us not get ahead of ourselves. I want you to look at some photos first.”

“The ones Abigail took?” Will asked, pushing the head of his shoe into the dirt idly.

“Not those, no,” Hannibal said, his voice coming from afar, before once again becoming clear. “I just sent them to you.”

“One sec,” Will said as he turned on the speaker. He clicked on the first picture and began to swipe. “Is this... Did you find a house already? I thought we’d have to stay at a hotel first, at least for a while.”

“I didn’t... find it, exactly. Although we can, of course, look for another house if this one isn’t to your liking.”

“Hannibal,” Will kept going back and forth between photos, having a hard time registering everything on the first glance but unable to stop his thumb from swiping. “Do you own property in France?”

“Among others,” Hannibal said, though he left it unsaid whether he meant other property in France, or more property in other countries. “It never hurts to be prepared.”

“Ah, I see.” *Safe houses*. Of course. “May I ask how you came to possess such... opulence?”

“You may,” Hannibal’s amusement translated very well. “In which case, I would have to confess that I, technically, carry the title of Count. But let this be a topic for another conversation. Do you like it?”

Will paused on the picture of a wide backyard, and could practically see dogs running around in it. Could he convince Hannibal to accept dogs? Will decided he would start lobbying with Abigail at first chance. “I like it. But nothing appears broken or in need of an upgrade. I might feel useless.”

“I am sure that, between the two of us, we will break our fair share of furniture,” Hannibal positively *purred*. “There will be plenty to fix, Will, I assure you.”

“Dear god,” Will said, “Enough already, you fucking sadist.” Hannibal’s laugh, so unexpected and loud, made him grin. “Will you and Abigail come for dinner?”

“I did promise your father more of my cooking,” Hannibal said. “In fact, we have been gathering ingredients for the occasion.”

“Hannibal-” Will felt a spike of adrenaline for what that might entail, but he was quickly calmed down.

“Nothing extraordinary,” Hannibal sounded amused, the fucker. “We couldn’t do that without you.”

“They should have called you ‘the Flirter.’” Will said, careful to be as discreet as possible. FBI had no reason to listen in on their calls but, as Hannibal said, it never hurt to be cautious.

“Finally a name I would bear with pride,” Hannibal said. “I will let you go back to your gardening now, Will Graham. Expect to see us in the evening. We will proceed from there.”

“Can’t wait,” Will said, and only noticed he was still smiling when his cheeks hurt, the plants firmly planted in the shade of the front porch.

*

Beau came home to find Will freshly out of shower, hair dripping into his shoulders still. “What’s this?” he asked, pointing at the phone on the dining table as he washed his hands in the kitchen sink, water draining much faster to Will’s satisfaction as he leaned on the counter.

“That’s your phone.”

“Willy, how many times-”

“No, dad, it ends now. You need the phone. I’ll be on the other side of the globe, and I’d like to be able to reach you.”

“So it’s settled then,” Beau said, drying his hands and moving to the table, casually pushing the phone a bit farther as he took a seat. “You’re really going?”

“I’m really going, yeah.” This whole thing still had that dreamlike quality, where everything seemed possible until one woke up to find that no, nothing ever was. It felt disconcerting, but in the best sense of the word.

“You know, Will,” his dad began. “I sometimes fantasized about your mother turning up at my door again.” This was the second time they talked about his mother, and the first time they did it sober, so Will, too, took a seat. “Sometimes she’d be regretful, asking forgiveness for abandoning you, us. And sometimes, she’d be wilful, telling me none of these would have happened if I kept in touch with her, and that she did what she had to do. Then it’d be me asking for her forgiveness. And sometimes, I’d seek her out, find her. Not with the family she surely has now, but alone and waiting for me. She’d be so happy to see me then.” Beau frowned. “But in all these daydreams, she’d be back with me, and we’d be together. She’d have the phone, she’d answer when you called, she’d pester me about getting on the road to visit you. She’d be my wife, and your mother, and-” His voice broke.

“Dad...” Will reached for the hand resting limply on the table top. Beau powered through.

“That guy is not sane, Will.” Beau did not appear to notice the non-sequitur, speaking faster now. “He has this look in his eyes. I see it, and if I can, I’m sure you can too. He’s dangerous.” Will nodded. There was no use lying now. “Today, at work, I kept thinking what he’d do if you did something he didn’t like. Left a dish at the counter, or tracked mud into the house, or listened to music with lyrics, I don’t know. I saw him snap. I saw you and the girl, Abigail, bleeding on the floor. Can you tell me, honestly, that couldn’t happen?”

“It could,” Will said, and the rose-coloured lens he had donned since the morning thinned.

“You are right, it could happen, dad. But I know this, and so does Abigail. He knows that we know. He made sure we were aware of what he was capable of. Cut off her ear and sent me to an asylum, you know that. I told you that.” Beau rubbed at his face with his free hand. Will remembered Abigail’s words about claws and teeth, and appreciated the wisdom she carried, far further than what her age entailed. “And he knows about us too. We are not prey. We bite back, and don’t let go without tearing a piece.” Beau turned to look at Will now, his eyes narrowed as if he was seeing Will for the first time.

“You are not... Prey?” he asked, the term sounded alien in his mouth. Will supposed it would. His father, for all his protective instincts and utilization of violence if needed, was not like them. Not like Will.

“We are not,” he replied, wanting to assure Beau while at the same time wanting to keep his father thinking the best of his son. It seemed impossible, and that was heart-breaking in its own right. “He knows better than to turn against us,” Will said. He still was not entirely sure that was the case, but he took a leap of faith, listened to the feeling in his gut. The words felt right and as he spoke them, he was more convinced of their accuracy. “Because if he did, I would make sure he wouldn’t live long enough to regret it.”

Beau’s hand tensed in under Will’s, and as he watched his father’s eyes gloss over, Will wondered what he was seeing in his mind’s eye now. Was it Will who was the one snapping? Was it Will’s hand holding the knife embedded in Hannibal’s gut? Will, covered with blood, spitting out a chunk of flesh with red teeth and gleaming eyes? As Will himself imagined these, he felt something settle deep within him.

Somehow, somewhere, Will had forgotten to feel guilt for imagining these kinds of things. For the first time in his life, Will felt right at home inside his own mind. He inhaled, exhaled, and smiled.

Beau, now back to his observation of his son, suppressed a shiver at the sight, and squeezed Will’s hand firmly.

“Good,” he said. He would not ask Will if he ever hurt someone. He did not want to know, because in case someone came asking him about Will one day, he wanted to say with a clear conscience that he did not know such a thing. “Good,” he repeated, and imagined Will standing tall and proud, confident as he appeared now, with an equal by his side. This boy, *his* boy, would never have to take on the world on his own. He would smirk around a forkful of expertly prepared food and proudly remember the boy who he made soil his pants, share a laugh with his family over the incident, and carry on. He would be appreciated and cherished for himself. Beau looked at Will, and saw that he would be *happy*.

“Good,” he said one last time, mirroring the smile. And that was that.

*

Everyone was seated at the same chairs around the dining table. Will already couldn’t remember what the dish was called, but it tasted divine on his tongue. Hannibal, upon arriving at the house, had immediately went to the kitchen to start on the dinner, and told Will and Abigail he wouldn’t mind it if they decided not to help. He might as well have told them to get lost.

“He’s so anal about cooking,” Abigail had said as they went to the living room. “It’s like he thinks we’d sabotage it or something.” Will has smirked, a nonverbal confirmation but a confirmation nonetheless. They had then settled down to watch one channel and make fun of the content until they got bored, and changed to another channel. Beau was smitten with Abigail, and had found her commentary funny as he drank his beer. In what felt like no time at all, they had been asked to join Hannibal in the kitchen, where the table was set and not

one utensil used in preparation was left on the counter, dirty or otherwise. Beau had rolled his eyes at Will upon noticing it, and Will had indulgently shaken his head.

“This is wonderful,” Abigail said. “I might ask for seconds. I am a growing young woman, after all.”

“You are old enough to go to college,” Will remarked. “On that note, have you given a thought about what you want?”

Abigail waited until he swallowed the food before answering. “I have. I was thinking I would try fine arts. Painting, and the like.” She tried to sound nonchalant, but now Will knew her well enough to see through it.

“Have anywhere specific in mind?” He asked.

“I didn’t, but you guys said France, and well, I could apply to Paris College of Art,” she said, as if daring any one of them to say anything against that.

“I have seen her drawings,” Hannibal said. “With more practice, I believe she will surpass me.”

“Narcissist,” Abigail said under her breath, and Hannibal grinned as if he had spoken to get this exact reaction. Will knew that was quite likely. Their eyes met.

“The house is in Paris, right?” Will commented, affecting an air of innocence. “What a pleasant coincidence, that the school you might, maybe, possibly want to apply is also there.”

“Shut up,” she grumbled, caught at her own game. She clapped back without hesitation.

“What about you, then? What are you going to do there? I’m not sure your diploma would be valid overseas. Will you become a house husband?”

“Not a bad idea, actually,” Will said, tilting his head in thought. “I find that I feel no desire to work in law enforcement or criminal investigation. Maybe later, I can do something like private investigation. I always had a thing for Jack’s fedora and ulster coat.” He smirked as Hannibal choked on his food. He watched with one brow playfully raised as Hannibal drank from his glass to calm it down. “For now, though, I think I’d like to take a break.”

“Then you shall,” Hannibal replied when he found his, albeit rough, voice.

“What about money, then?” Beau asked. “I don’t like the thought of you living like a kept man, Willy.”

“I have some savings, dad. I wasn’t exactly living in luxury all those years I worked. I have enough to live like a Countess.” Will smirked when Hannibal’s hand twitched on the table, as though he was holding himself back from reaching out and touching Will. He could easily do so without even rising up from his seat, but Will appreciated the self-control. It was hot, really. Made Will want to see Hannibal *break*. He did not meet his eyes lest it proved to be the thing to accomplish that goal.

“Also,” Hannibal said, “I have accumulated enough over the years that we would never want for anything.” In his desire to assure Beau, he sounded like he was flaunting his wealth. Beau, like Will, was inclined more towards “kill the rich” than admiring them, but now, he looked appeased.

“And you,” Will looked at Hannibal. “What will you do?”

“My psychiatry degree is internationally recognized,” Hannibal said. “I can continue my practice there. However, I anticipate that I will be very distracted for a while. I have a certain admiration for... Paris. I’d like some time to acquaint myself with every part in detail.” He paused, and moved his hands in an elegant impression of a shrug. “So many museums, works of art, and architectural wonders. I can hardly wait.”

“I’m sure you can’t,” Abigail quipped. “I’d like to offer a new rule for dinners,” she said, gesturing towards her lap where she had placed a napkin, likely due to Hannibal’s previous goading. Will would have liked to have been there for that specific lesson. “No flirting at the table, huh?”

“I second that,” Beau sighed, resigned, “It’s terrible for the appetite.”

“Do you see?” Will pointedly asked Hannibal. “Do you see what I mean now?”

“Yes, dear,” Hannibal smirked, infuriatingly smug, and true to his word, spent much less time talking for the rest of the meal. When it was done and Will gathered the dishes, Hannibal put a hand on Beau’s forearm to stop him from helping. “Please, you have been very hospitable. I insist that you enjoy your evening. Allow me to help Will.”

Will, glad to have his back turned to the rest of them, lifted his eyebrows. His suspicions were confirmed when, once Abigail and Beau were in the living room and the TV’s volume increased, he was grabbed by the shoulders and slammed to the fridge, lips covering his before he could draw a breath.

Will fought back appropriately for the chosen method of attack; his hands grabbed fistfuls of Hannibal’s hair as he directed the kiss, pushing his tongue past willingly parting lips and ground his groin against Hannibal’s. Hannibal, for his part, swallowed Will’s groan efficiently, and pressed harder against him, making sure their bodies were touching from chests to knees.

“I’m going to devour you,” Hannibal growled into his ear.

“Yes, yes,” Will whispered back.

“I would have liked you on silk sheets the colour of your eyes, spread out before me like a feast” Hannibal said huskily, “but you make me forget about dignity. It’s like a switch goes off, and I do not care whether we are on the forest floor or in your father’s kitchen, rutting like animals.”

“Shut up,” Will says, voice abandoning him at a particularly harsh thrust halfway through. “Not here, not now.”

“I know,” Hannibal stilled but did not withdraw, greedily breathing in Will’s scent, nose running up and down his neck. “The earliest chance we’ll find will be on the plane. Tell me, isn’t it a thing for people to have sex while airborne?”

“Listen to you,” Will chuckled in silent huffs of breath. “A thing,” he repeated.

“You’ll have to excuse me. I happen to have a very limited supply of blood to my brain at the moment.”

“Fuck,” Will bit his own lower lip, eyes shut tight to resist the temptation of sinking his teeth to Hannibal’s lips. He let his head hit the fridge as he fought for composure. “Please don’t talk.”

With a final kiss to Will’s neck, Hannibal stepped back and moved towards the sink. Quick hands fixed his wild hair, and straightened his clothes. Before Will could stop leaning on the fridge and stand up on his own, he was back from debauched lover to Hannibal fucking Lecter, and Will resented him a little for it. “I wash, you dry?” Hannibal said, and started without waiting for an answer. Will vowed to refuse him entry to the mile-high club, and with the aid of the pleasure that thought evoked, he grabbed the drying towel, and went to help.

*

“How long do you think *that* will take?”

“I don’t know... But if we want to keep the food down, we should turn on the volume. Just in case.”

“Smart girl. Oh and Will got me a phone now. You asked yesterday.”

“Oh great. Just let me... Wait. And now... Sending... Done.”

“...You took this yesterday?”

“Yep.”

“It’s... It’s really good.”

“Oh my god, is it all men or just you three? You are always one moment away from crying like a baby.”

“It’s most men, but they’ll never admit to it.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“You’ll send me more photos if you take them, right?”

“I want something in return, though. Blackmail material, for Will.”

“I do have albums full of photos. Missing front teeth, bowl haircuts, take your pick.”

“It will be our little secret, Pops.”

“Deal.”

*

When it came the time to say goodbye, Will found his father calmer than he thought he would have been.

“You said you’ll visit. And I can call you now,” Beau patted his back, just on the right side of rough, as he held Will. “In a way, we’ll be closer than ever, kiddo. Don’t start worrying now.”

“I’m not,” Will denied, even though the reality of leaving his father all by himself in his house, to fly across the ocean and build a life for himself there, hit him like an eighteen wheeler just then. A couple more steps, and they’d get in the Bentley, and only a few dozen meters later, they’d be out of sight. The thought didn’t sit well with him. But Beau was right. This was going to be the time in their lives when contact was easiest to achieve.

“I gave your number to the guy at the dock,” Will said, “He’ll call if a gig comes up.”

“That’s very thoughtful of you,” Beau mocked. “You wanna work your old man to the ground?”

“I can help, you know.” It was as Abigail and Hannibal carried all their bags to the car that Will remembered things he should have talked to his dad about beforehand. Typical. “I can send you-”

“Shut it.” Beau squeezed his shoulder. “All I want from you is that you keep your nose clean. Can you do that?”

“I’ll do my best.” With a wry smile, Will stepped back to allow Abigail to hug Beau.

“Remember the deal,” she said, loud despite the apparent secrecy in the words.

“You too, lass. Good luck with the art thing. Don’t you get lost in Parisian museums too.” Abigail’s laugh, high and clear like a bell, rang through the empty street. Beau turned to greet Hannibal, the last one to approach the porch.

“I hear Seine is rife with catfish,” Beau hinted without any decorum, accepting the handshake but not letting it go before Hannibal replied.

“We’ll be sure to go fishing, then. I’d like the chance to learn the hobby, almost as much as I’d like to provide the meat.”

“For god’s sake, Hannibal,” Will murmured, and when Beau raised an eyebrow in question, he shook his head.

“Well then,” Beau took a deep breath. “Bon voyage, and all that. Go on before I call the cops on you for loitering.”

“This is not a public park, and we are not prostitutes, dad,” Will murmured, but at the sharp command -*Shoo!*- he did follow Hannibal and Abigail to the car. Once he got on the passenger seat, with Hannibal behind the wheel and Abigail sprawled across the back seat, Hannibal spoke up.

“He is a tough man,” he said. “He has you, and now, he has us too. He will be more than fine.”

“I just hope he does not let his charge run out and forget to plug it,” Will said, waving at Beau as the car was started.

“Don’t worry, he won’t.” Abigail said cryptically, also waving. When they turned the corner and Beau disappeared from sight, Will took a breath.

“That little extra bit at the end, what was that you said?” Hannibal asked Abigail.

“What, the deal?” Abigail returned the question with a question.

“Yes, that extra bit. What was that about?”

“I’m sworn to secrecy. I’ll never tell. But you know what I *will* tell you? Cut down the cannibalism puns a little. Could have given Pops a heart attack if he got it.”

“Yes!” Will jumped in. “No cannibalism puns unless it’s just the three of us. I’ll hunt you down and disembowel you if we get caught because you wanted to be *funny*.”

“No more voicing my appreciation for my beloved, and no more witty references to our hobbies.” Will watched as Hannibal’s eyes narrowed and he licked his lips. “Anything else?” He asked flatly. He was peeved. It was perfect.

“Wear casual clothes more often,” Will replied immediately.

“I want a dog!” Abigail said without missing a beat, to Will’s genuine delight.

“At least two,” he jumped in, nodding in enthusiastic assent. “And they’ll be allowed into the house.”

“Oh, and a fast food night, at least once a week!” Abigail straightened to lean in between their seats, her hair swinging as they took another turn.

“Count me in,” Will said, holding his lips in between his teeth to make sure he didn’t laugh. Hannibal’s eye twitched. “How about-”

“It’s not too late, you know,” Hannibal said, as he stepped on the brake a bit too suddenly at a red light, making them swing forward. He turned to glare icily at them both. “If you dislike what I have to offer so much, I can go right back and drop you off at Beau’s.”

“You would *never*,” Abigail said, right before Will smiled and added, softly, “You love us.”

It happened slowly, and was akin to watching an ice cube melt in the sun: You watched it without blinking, and it remained the same, but then you noticed the growing puddle and diminishing size of the cube, and knew it was really melting. Hannibal's tense chin loosened, the lines on his forehead smoothed, the narrowed eyes widened, and after a couple of miles of watching him with a smile, Will heard him reply.

"More casual clothes, but only at home. At least two dogs, allowed in the house but not on the furniture. One night of that despicable trash you call food, but only once a month, and only outside. I won't have it stink up the house."

In his peripheral vision, Will saw Abigail grin, looking young and carefree in a way Will doubted she had ever been. His main focus was Hannibal, though, and that was how he caught the slight twist of his lips at the corner. On impulse, Will leaned in and pressed a small kiss right there.

Hannibal might as well have said *I love you*, and Will might as well have said, *I love you too*.

A beep distracted him as he withdrew. It was a text from Abigail, and it said what Will now knew was a term of endearment for her.

Softies :P

And that was that.

End Notes

All human wisdom is contained in these two words: Wait, and hope. -Alexandre Dumas

Will describes his love for Hannibal with these words: Freely, purely, and with passion. They are a direct reference to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnet 43, How Do I Love Thee?

Je peux parler un peu de français: I can speak some French.

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